Didn’t the Shi’ah Imams Pray *Tarawih* ?

Imam al-Baqir (‘a) and Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) were asked about the permissibility of praying optional prayers in congregation during the nights of Ramadan. They both narrated a tradition of the Prophet (s) where he said:

- “**Verily, the offering of *nafila* (recommended prayers) in congregation during the nights of Ramadan is an *INNOVATION*.**… O people! do not say *nafila* prayers of Ramadan in congregation…. Without doubt, performing a minor act of worship which is according to the *sunna* is better than performing a major act of worship which is an innovation.”
  [al-Hurr al-`Amili, *Wasa’il al-Shi`ah*, volume 8, page 45]

This view of the Imams from the Prophet’s progeny is confirmed by a scholar well-known amongst the Ahl al-Sunnah who writes:

- “The progeny of the Prophet (s) say that congregation in *Tarawih* is an ***INNOVATION***”.
  [al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar*, volume 3, page 50]

What do Sunni scholars say about praying *Tarawih* at home ?

- “The scholars agree on its merit, but they differ on whether it is better to pray it in one’s home individually or in congregation in a mosque.” Al-Nawawi, the famous commentator of *Sahih Muslim*, then goes on to list scholars who support the second and dominant view. He then writes: “**Malik, Abu Yusuf, some Shafi’i scholars, and others say that it is better to pray it individually in the home**”.
  [al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, volume 6, page 286]

Conclusion

The Shi’ah always aspire to pray the night prayer – called the *Tahajjud* or *Qiyam al-Layl* or *Salat al-Layl* – in the last part of the nights of every month, particularly during Ramadan. They are also commended to offer additional *nawafil* prayers during the nights of Ramadan. However, they offer these optional prayers mostly in their homes and never in congregation. By doing so they abide by the Qur’an and the *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad (s).

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And during a part of the night, engage in the night prayer (Tahajjud) beyond what is incumbent on you; perhaps your Lord will raise you to a position of great glory. (17:79)

Prophet Muhammad (s) said regarding the month of Ramadan:
“Whoever establishes the night prayer (*Qiyam al-Layl*) in it out of sincere Faith and hope for reward from Allah, all of his previous sins will be forgiven.”
[*Sahih al-Bukhari*, volume 3, book 32, number 226]

Why do the Shi’ah avoid *Tarawih* congregations?

The Ahl al-Sunnah generally consider it a *sunnah* to offer specific evening prayers – the *Tarawih* – in congregation during the holy month of Ramadan. The Shi’ah, while being commended to offer similar *nawafil* (recommended prayers), are not allowed to offer them in congregation. This practice of the Shi’ah is in accordance with the orders and *sunnah* of the Prophet (s).

Brothers and sisters from the Ahl al-Sunnah come together in *Tarawih* congregations during the early evenings of the month of Ramadan. They stand in prayer and recite the Qur'an, and may Allah (swt) reward them for their sincere intentions and actions. However, **the word *Tarawih* was never mentioned by the Qur'an or the Prophet (s) to describe these extra congregational prayers during the evenings of the month of Ramadan.** It is a term developed later amongst Muslims. Linguistically, the word "**Tarawih**" is the plural of the word '*tarwiha'* referring to the short period of rest between every four units of the prayer. Later, the entire congregational prayers in the nights of Ramadan were called by this term.

Origins of *Tarawih* as a Congregational Prayer

It is a well-established fact that the *Tarawih*, as a congregational night prayer of Ramadan, owes its existence to the order of the second caliph, 'Umar b. al-Khattab.

- Narrated Abu Hurayra: Allah's Apostle said, "Whoever prayed at night the whole month of Ramadan out of sincere faith and hoping for a reward from Allah, then all his previous sins will be forgiven." Ibn Shihab (a sub-narrator) said, "When Allah's Apostle died, the people continued observing that (**i.e. Nawafil offered individually, not in congregation**), and it remained as such during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr and in the early days of 'Umar's Caliphate." 'Abdur Rahman bin 'Abdul Qari said, "I went out in the company of 'Umar bin Al-Khattab one night in Ramadan to the mosque and found the people praying in different groups – a man praying alone or a man praying with a little group behind him. Then, 'Umar said, '**In my opinion** I would better collect these (people) under the leadership of one *Qari* (reciter) [i.e. let them pray in congregation!]'. So, he made up his mind to congregate them behind Ubayy bin Ka'b. Then, on another night, I went again in his company and the people were praying behind their reciter. On that, **'Umar remarked, 'What an excellent *BID'A*** (***INNOVATION*** in religion) **this is**; but the prayer which they do not perform, but rather sleep at its time, is better than the one they are offering.' He meant the prayer in the last part of the night."
  [*Sahih al-Bukhari*, volume 3, book 32, number 227]

- "It was called ***BID'AH*** because the Prophet (s) did not use to pray it in congregation, and neither was it prayed like that in the time of al-Siddiq (referring to the first Caliph), nor in the early part of night or with these number of units."
  [al-Qastallani, *Irshad al-Sari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, volume 5, page 4]
  [al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, volume 6, page 287]

- "'Umar was the first who set the example of the night prayer of Ramadan, the *Tarawih*, and gathered people for it, and instructed different regions regarding it. This was during the month of Ramadhan of the year 14 (*hijri*). He appointed for the people reciters of the Qur'an who led the *Tarawih* prayer for men and women."
  [Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat*, volume 3, page 281]
  [al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*, page 137]
  [al-'Ayni, *'Umdat al-Qari fi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*, volume 6, page 125]

Congregation in Mosque or Individually at Home?

Offering the optional prayers individually inside the home and away from congregation in mosque is highly recommended by the Prophet (s) as it brings more blessings for the home and family and helps in the Islamic upbringing of children.

- The Prophet (s) said: "O people! Perform your prayers at your homes, for the **best prayer of a person is what he performs at his home, except the compulsory (congregational) prayer.**"
  [*Sahih al-Bukhari*, volume 9, book 92, number 393]
  [al-Nasa'i, *Sunan*, volume 3, p. 161, p. 198]

- Once Abdullah bin Mas'ud asked the Prophet (s): "Which is better; to pray in my house or in the mosque?" The Prophet (s) replied: "Do you not see how near to the mosque my house is? **To pray in my house is more beloved to me than to pray in the mosque except for the obligatory prayers**."
  [Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, volume 1, page 439, number 1378]

- Narrated Zayd bin Thabit: Allah's Apostle (s) made a small room (with a palm leaf mat). He (s) came out (of his house) and prayed in it. Some men came and joined him in his prayer. Then again the next night they came for the prayer, but the Prophet (s) delayed and did not come out to them. So they raised their voices and knocked the door with small stones (to draw his attention). **He came out to them in a state of anger**, saying, "You are still insisting (on your deed) that I fear this prayer might become obligatory on you. So, **O you people! offer this prayer at your homes, for the best prayer of a person is the one which he offers at home, except the compulsory (congregational) prayer**."
  [*Sahih al-Bukhari*, volume 8, book 73, number 134]